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AUTHOR Hus, Linda A.; Bergeron, Bette
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ABSTRACT

During the 1993-1994 academic year, Purdue University Calumet, Indiana, (PUC) developed and implemented a comprehensive portfolio assessment plan for preservice teachers that emphasized professional standards and the Education Department's preservice goals. In 1994, PUC implemented the plan with students considering entrance into teacher education. The portfolios consist of suggested entries, rational statements explaining each entry, reflection papers, and faculty/student interviews. The portfolios measure the progress of undergraduate preservice educators and determine whether program outcomes are being achieved. Each student teacher maintains a portfolio, which is reviewed at three points in time. Students meet with education faculty to discuss their portfolios, and they attend informal meetings where they can evaluate peers' portfolios. They have a final portfolio review with the university supervisor at the end of student teaching. Several recurring issues have emerged with PUC's teacher education portfolios that have promoted continual refinement of the process. The issues relate to entry selection, student reflection, and evaluation. One critical challenge to the process involves reviewing and evaluating individual portfolios, given limited resources (particularly faculty time). Developing a tool that measures student outcomes as reflected by nine standards remains a primary challenge. (Contains 11 references). (SM)

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Portfolios and Program Assessment: Addressing the Challenges of Admission to a Pre-Service Education Program

Linda A. Hus, Director of Teacher Education Services
Dr. Bette Bergeron, Director of Teacher Education

A. Introduction

This presentation will focus on the development and implementation of a comprehensive portfolio assessment plan required of all elementary and secondary students at a large commuter campus, Purdue University Calumet (PUC). Portfolios have gained wide appeal, particularly at the elementary and middle school levels, as educators become more informed regarding appropriate means to measure students' growth and abilities. Because of their potential value to reflect on growth and needs of both students and their instruction, several states have initiated programs mandating classroom uses of portfolios. Despite their potential, however, uses of portfolios within higher education have not as rapidly evolved. Some institutions have implemented portfolios within required coursework (e.g., Stahle & Mitchell, 1993; Mosenthal, Daniels, & Mekkelsen, 1993; Winsor, 1994), or as part of interview preparation. Fewer instances of program-wide portfolios have been reported within teacher education, however. This oversight is unfortunate; as suggested by NASDEC (1994), portfolios can be addressed in the proposed presentation extends previous uses of portfolios to assess both individual students and program goals throughout the teacher education program.

B. Objectives

Specifically, the following questions guide the ongoing inquiry: (1) What are preservice teachers' perceptions regarding the benefits of portfolios for their own professional growth? (2) What are their perceptions regarding benefits to the teacher education program? and (3) What challenges to implementation are perceived to exist and have been overcome?

C. Theoretical Perspectives

The movement towards portfolio assessment throughout various facets of education reflects current knowledge regarding the nature of learning and effective instruction (e.g., NAEYC, 1989; Neill & Medina, 1989). This knowledge rejects previous conceptions of skills-driven evaluation, often measured through standardized tools, and the rigidity that these assessments held in their limited view of individual learning. These evaluative tools have forced teachers to attend to discrete, isolated skills, which in turn "results in a narrowing of possible curriculum and reduction of teachers' ability to adapt, create, or divers" (Smith, 1991, pg. 10).

In response to identified needs to more closely match assessment with current learning theory, uses of classroom and professional portfolios have emerged. Portfolios offer the flexibility to capture individual styles in varied contexts and can reflect broad views of teaching and learning (Wolf, Whinery, & Hagerty, 1995). Gomez, Graue, and Bloch (1991) purport that portfolios allow educators to effectively tie together curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The potential for reflectivity, however is perhaps the portfolio's greatest asset (Messner, Cole, Swonigan, & Tillman, 1992/3). As students and teachers organize and select entries for inclusion, and as conferences regarding portfolio contents are held, both teachers and students gain a deeper appreciation for individual abilities and program effectiveness. These advantages have been tapped in the reported study, where portfolios are used to support preservice teachers' professional self-exploration and their suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the teacher education program. The future impact of this inquiry lies not only within these individual's future classrooms, but will extend to those young students with whom they will soon teach.

D. Methods

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The portfolios addressed in this proposal are in the third year of development. During the 1993-94 academic year, a portfolio plan was created that focused on professional standards and the Department's preservice goals. This plan was fully implemented in the fall of 1994 with students who were considering entrance into teacher education. The portfolio consists of four components: suggested entries, rational statements explaining each entry, reflection papers, and faculty/student interviews. The suggested entries are based on the newly developed Department of Education's program standards for the students progressing through their program.

As teacher education program outcomes were being developed and refined, an equally difficult challenge remained in how to annually measure the progress of over 750 undergraduate teacher education students while determining whether program outcomes where achieved. Though traditional quantitative forms of assessment were already in place, including student teaching evaluations and program surveys, the use of professional portfolios emerged as one additional means for authentically measuring student outcomes. The goals of this initiative are to support the growth of quality professionals and to provide alternative means for gathering feedback regarding program evaluation.

Portfolios are maintained by each individual teacher education student and reviewed at three points during their program. As part of their program admission process, students interview with two education faculty members to discuss their initial portfolio development and identify strengths in needs of both the individual student and the program as a whole. As students enter into their methods coursework, they then attend informational meetings where they have the opportunity to review their peers' portfolios. Students have a final portfolio interview with their University Supervisor at the conclusion of their student teaching experience. Checklists are used during each of the three phases to mark progress, identify problems with writing mechanics, and check for required elements.

E. Challenges

As PUC's teacher education portfolios are implemented, several reoccurring issues have emerged that have prompted the continual refinement of this process. In particular, these challenges relate to entry selection, student reflection, and evaluation. Initially, portfolio entries were prescribed and tied directly to specified course assignments. They were also required to produce a reestablished number of entries from general education, professional education, professional methods, and student teaching. While portfolio entries were prescribe, however, there was the exception from the Department that portfolios would support students' development as reflective professionals. Not surprisingly, it quickly became quite evident that prescription and reflection were, in this case, mutually exclusive.

The challenges of prescription and reflection are being addressed through a more open-ended approach to the portfolio process. Currently, teacher education students individually select entries reflective of the nine program standards. These entries can be drawn from any course, field, or individual experience. This allows the portfolio to be more individualized, and provides students with the opportunity to more carefully reflect on their entry choices. Each entry selection is accompanied by a rationale statement that identifies the entry's purpose as it relates to the student's individual growth and program outcomes. In addition, students are asked to develop reflection papers at the beginning and end of their program that address issues specified by the Department.

A critical challenge remains that of reviewing and evaluating individual portfolios given limited resources, particularly demands on faculty time. At least some degree of faculty resistance to assessment endeavors remains a challenge for most institutions. Palomba (1996) found that faculty may confuse program assessment with faculty evaluation or simply refuse to participate. Faculty assistance is needed if assessment activities are to be carried out successfully. At PUC, this challenge is being addressed through campus workshops featuring both national an in-house speakers. As with most departments, Education has an assessment committee that jointly addresses concerns, revises assessment processes and tools, and develops the annual report. Graduate students assist in screening portfolios , and all faculty members are

encouraged to participate in student/faculty interviews. While assessment endeavors require additional faculty involvement, sharing the load of responsibilities and integrating faculty in the processes and successes of these endeavors will support the goals of program assessment.

The use of portfolios within PUC's teacher education programs has provided the Department with important data that may have otherwise been unavailable using traditional means. Providing faculty and students with opportunities to talk with each other through the process of portfolio review also strengthens the program because it helps build a sense of mutual collaboration. As revisions are made to allow for more individualized reflection, students are recognizing the potential of portfolios in measuring their own growth as professionals. They are also recognizing the necessity of having portfolios as a tool for job interviewing as the regional job market continues to be highly competitive.

It has also become apparent, however, that additional challenges need to be addressed if a truly accurate picture of the teacher education programs and its students is to be achieved. Developing a tool that measures students' outcomes as reflected by the nine standards remains a primary challenge. The checklist currently used only addresses superficial requirements; a tool that identifies a deeper level of student understanding and professional competence will need to be created. Additionally, there is a concern that the very process of mandating portfolios is counter to the potential reflectivity that can be the hallmark of this tool.

As the Department's involvement with portfolios grows, it is becoming more evident that the greatest challenge for this initiative may be maintaining student ownership over the process. If that can be achieved, portfolios will provide programs with an effective tool for measuring and developing institutional goals.

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